

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office

February 23, 1998 LB 1063

SENATOR WITEK: ...what the cost of this program is. Thank you.

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, members. I'm going to say that I do admire Senator Witek's persistence and her desire to try to raise some issues and call into question some things I think many of us feel pretty strongly about. And it's somewhat frustrating, but I want to respond to her concerns and tell you that I think every one of them are met and exceeded by this legislation and by previous work of this Legislature. First off, she talks about the whole Medicaid program and we need to look at the Medicaid program and understand more about it, we need to have a discussion on the floor, that she doesn't remember us spending much time on this. Well, Senator Witek, we spent the 1993 session focused on Medicaid. We spent the 1992 interim, with a massive task force that looked at cutting back on Medicaid. We came in with a package of over 20 bills in 1993, your first year in the Legislature, where we cut back tremendously on Medicaid, reduced the cost of Medicaid, went to a managed care system, and put a brake on the spending of Medicaid. So we have, this Legislature has and you have, when you were first here, spent a great deal of time on the topic and had a great deal of accomplishment in trying to reform the Medicaid program. Secondly, following that effort on Medicaid, in 1993, 1994, 1995 we worked hard on welfare reform. And the issue before you is not Medicaid, which is what Senator Witek was talking about earlier, it's welfare. What she wants to do is cut back the decision we made several years ago to reform the welfare system so that we would provide transitional assistance to individuals who are moving off of welfare and into the workforce. And to do that, what we found from, again, a massive study and work by this Legislature and by an outside task force is that child care and health care were two of the greatest factors that led to individuals going on the welfare system and staying on the welfare system. And if we could address providing help to families so that they would not have to be on welfare in order to get child care and health care, that we would find less demand on the welfare system. So what we did, and I think we did the right thing, was to provide assistance, transitional assistance to individuals moving off of welfare for